

THE BIGGEST NEWS THAT YOU DIDN'T READ OR HEAR LAST WEEK

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Roddy Stinson Column

One of the most significant news events of 2005 occurred last Tuesday. However, you missed it.

I can say that with confidence because a check of Express-News databases found only a brief United Press International report of the event, and that report was not published in any newspaper or mentioned on any TV/radio broadcast.

Why did the news die aborning?

Because it bordered on heresy:

"According to a study released by the Education Policy Studies Laboratory at Arizona State University and the Great Lakes Center for Educational Research and Practice, the pressure associated with high-stakes testing has no real impact on student achievement."

Let me put that another way so no one will miss the heretical significance:

The standardized-test-as-God formula for educational success — concocted and adhered to religiously by the political and educational establishments in Texas and elsewhere around the nation — has been dissected and shown to be a sham.

The proof was produced by three scholarly researchers — David C. Berliner and Gene V. Glass of Arizona State University and Sharon L. Nichols of the University of Texas at San Antonio — who analyzed National Assessment of Educational Progress test data from 25 states and determined:

There is no consistent link between the pressure to score high on a state-mandated exam and that state's student performance on the NAEP.

The pressure created by the standardized-test-as-God formula has primarily served to increase student retention and dropout rates.

Nichols, the study's lead author, concluded:

"A rapidly growing body of research evidence on the harmful effects of high-stakes testing, along with no reliable evidence of improved performance by students on NAEP tests of achievement, suggests that we need a moratorium in public education on the use of high-stakes testing."

In addition, that is why the remarkable study has been (and will continue to be) ignored.

For more than 20 years, the nation's educational and political establishments have touted the standardized-test-as-God philosophy as the solution to the nation's academic shortcomings. And the media establishment — like a baby bird with mouth agape — has swallowed the worm without a peep.

These elite groups could never admit their foolishness ... could never confess that they took tens of billions of dollars designated for improving public schools and blew it on educational hocus-pocus that was doomed to fail and that enriched no one but testing companies, high-dollar consultants and political demagogues.

Dissemination of the truth might cost them their air of superiority.
(Oh, the psychic pain.)

So don't look for any serious public discussion of the Nichols/Glass/Berliner findings.

There won't be any.

Don't search for the trio's names on educator-convention programs or lists of witnesses at legislative hearings.

They won't be there.

Don't surf TV-talk channels or monitor newspaper editorial pages looking for commentator praise for the three researchers.

You will just waste your time.

In fact, you will never see or hear the matter mentioned again.

I theologically guarantee it.

Postscript..

Out of curiosity, I looked in the Express-News archives to find the column in which I first used the term, "standardized-test-as-God" to describe the misbegotten path of Texas education.

The date: Oct. 6, 1991.

The column: Parental complaints about the education community's all consuming focus on preparing students to take the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills. ("My daughter has brought home no work from school this year," one mother reported. "The first five weeks of classes have been devoted to drilling the kids for the TAAS test.")

At the end of the column, I asked rhetorically:

"Where, when and how will the standardized-test-as-God nightmare end?"

Fourteen years later, the question is still relevant, the nightmare is still real and the end is nowhere in sight.